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THE CIA AND A SOVIET TANK

The Central Intelligence Agency's recently publicized effort to retrieve a Soviet submarine which sunk to the floor of the mid-Pacific wasn't the first time the CIA went to great lengths to get its hands on a huge piece of Russian military equipment. A previously unreported exploit involved a big Soviet tank.

Shortly after the outbreak of the 1967 "Six-Day War" between Israel and its Arab neighbors, the Israelis captured the late-model tank and turned it over to the CIA. The intelligence agency immediately flew the tank across the Atlantic in a jet freighter and deposited it at Camp Peary, a secret CIA base just outside Williamsburg, Va.

Armaments experts from throughout the country then were called to Camp Peary, a sprawling base publicly identified only as an "Armed Forces experimental training activity," where they went over the tank from turret to tracks in order to determine how advanced the Russians were in the development and production of armored vehicles.

In fact, capturing and examining other nations' weaponry to check on new developments is a specialty of not only the CIA but other countries' intelligence services as well. But the task usually involves relatively common military items such as rifles, mortars and bazookas and it's rare that something as large as a submarine, tank or airplane is retrieved.